

## **Dying to Talk? Co-producing resources with young people to get them talking about bereavement, death and dying.**

### **Principle Author:**

Dr Jane Booth  
Faculty of Arts, Business and Social Sciences  
University of Wolverhampton  
[j.booth3@wlv.ac.uk](mailto:j.booth3@wlv.ac.uk)  
ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5129-2475>

### **Author 2:**

Dr Karina Croucher  
Senior Lecturer in Archaeology  
University of Bradford  
[K.Croucher@bradford.ac.uk](mailto:K.Croucher@bradford.ac.uk)

### **Author 3:**

Dr Eleanor Bryant  
Lecturer in Psychology  
School of Social Sciences  
University of Bradford  
[e.j.bryant@bradford.ac.uk](mailto:e.j.bryant@bradford.ac.uk)

### **Abstract:**

The Dying to Talk project aimed to build resilience in young people around the topic of death, dying and bereavement. Starting conversations early in life, could buttress people's future wellbeing when faced with bereavement and indeed their own mortality. Indeed, research indicates that a key feature in young people's experience of bereavement is 'powerlessness' (Ribbens McCarthy, 2007). Drawing on the principles of co-production, young people led the development of the project aimed at encouraging young people to talk about death, using Archaeology as a facilitator to those conversations. The partnership between the university, voluntary sector and young people proved to be a positive and empowering one. It laid the foundations for future collaboration and developed a framework for engaging young people in talking about death, building their resilience for dealing with death and dying in the future; a step towards building a Compassionate City for young people (Kellehear, 2012).

**Key Words:** Death, Dying and Bereavement; Young people; Co-production; Resilience; Archaeology

## **Introduction: Dying to Talk**

The Dying to Talk project (Bradford, West Yorkshire, UK, 2017-18) was a transdisciplinary collaboration between the University of Bradford, local voluntary organisations, and a group of young people aged 16-24. The project aimed to test whether using archaeology would act as a facilitator to get young people talking comfortably about death, dying and bereavement. The project also aimed to work co-productively with young people, and relevant local voluntary sector organisations, to produce resources and a Festival of the Dead, as a way of breaking down taboos around talking about death, building resilience of young people around the topic of death, dying and bereavement, and thus enhancing their (future) wellbeing.

As the data from the evaluations indicate, the project outputs were well-received by the young participants, as well as the school groups that took part in the festival event and their teachers. The project succeeded in empowering the young people to co-produce resources and build a framework for engaging young people in talking about death and dying. Whilst our evaluations showed that some areas of the project did not always reflect the principles of co-production, the partnership was a positive and creative one, laying the foundations for future collaboration in order to develop the scope and reach of the project. Nonetheless, reflecting on the process has highlighted the conditions and adaptations to professional practice required to work co-productively with young people.

## **Death, Dying and Bereavement**

Wellbeing is a state “in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community” (WHO, 2014). This definition encompasses the aim and direction of the Dying to Talk project, to improve wellbeing by developing resilience in young people towards death, dying and bereavement. Death is a universal event experienced by all living beings. However, the professionalisation of death, in which we devolve responsibility to health and social care professionals, diminishes the ‘ordinariness of death’ (Kellehear, 2012: ix), taking care out of the community, and diminishing our capacity, as individuals, family members and friends, to deal with death and dying. As sources such as the World Health Organisation, Dying Matters, and the UK’s National Health Service recognise, it is important to recognise death as a natural part of life. Work around the concept of the “Compassionate City” (Kellehear, 2012) emphasises the inclusivity of death which ‘goes on in every community, every day, this very moment’ (2012: viii). The compassionate city promotes the idea that communities should embrace ‘the care of the dying’ and ‘those living with loss’ (Kellehear, 2012: 94). Indeed, talking about personal experiences of loss is a powerful way of both healing the self, improving wellbeing, as well as strengthening the potential for individuals to support each other. However, this is reliant on ‘those friends

and family know(ing) what to say and what to do in these circumstances i.e. the circumstances of death or loss, expected or otherwise' (Kellehear, 2012: ix). Therefore, we need to learn to talk about death.

Starting that conversation early in life, by getting young people to feel more comfortable talking about death and dying, could buttress people's future health and wellbeing when faced with bereavement and undoubtedly their own mortality. Not only that but research has indicated that a key feature in young people's experience of bereavement is 'powerlessness'; not being able to 'deal with their bereavement experiences at the time.....to have their feelings socially acknowledged', and often 'excluded from key family decisions (such as whether or not to attend a funeral), as well as being deprived of information about the terminal illness or death of a family member' (Ribbens McCarthy, 2007 p293). Indeed, bereavement is frequently treated 'as a marginal issue in the lives of children and young people, relevant to only a small, if unfortunate, minority' rather than, in fact, bereavement being 'a statistically "normal" part of growing up' (Ribbens McCarthy, 2007: 287-8). Bereavement for young people is complicated by social and cultural processes that discourage "everyday" conversations about death, dying and bereavement, and privileges the adult experience of grief over that of the young person (Holland, 2001).

This lack of a voice on the subject of death places young people "at risk" from developing negative outcomes such as depression (Ribbens McCarthy, 2007). However the agency of young people can be enhanced through constructive relations with their peers (Holland, 2001), with 'close supportive relationships with peers' able to mitigate against the 'power differences and control that may occur in relationships with parents' (Ribbens McCarthy, 2007 p294). Therefore, getting young people talking comfortably about death and dying, particularly with their peers, could support the foundations for compassionate communities, challenging the taboos surrounding the discussion of death, and potentially enhancing their future wellbeing and the wellbeing of those around them.

## **National Context**

Child Bereavement UK notes that at any time 1 in 6 young people have experienced a significant bereavement. Harrison and Harrington (2001) reported that 78% of young people aged 11-16 years had experienced the death of either a close relative or friend. Other studies indicate that 1 in 29 school-age children had suffered the bereavement of a parent or sibling- 'that's a child in every class' - and over 10,000 deaths of babies, children and young people occur a year, 'that's 28 everyday' (www.childbereavement.org.uk). Furthermore, bereavement is a socio-economic issue,

with the death of a parent more likely to be experienced by children from low-earning families, and the death of a peer more likely to be experienced by children with disabilities.

However, services for young people, including those in the statutory sector, the community and voluntary sectors, are at the receiving end of major economic cuts<sup>1</sup>. This has led to a generation of young people coping with bereavement with little formal support. The detrimental effects of child bereavement have been well documented by Aynsley-Green (2017). His studies demonstrate that whilst some responses to grief may be short-lived, many persist into adulthood. These include depression, smoking, risk-taking behaviour, unemployment, poor educational attainment and criminal activity. The British Medical Association notes the correlation between bereavement in childhood and prison populations. Drawing on a study of 6000 young offenders carried out by the Prison Reform Trust (PRT), they state,

‘the experience of bereavement is also a significant feature of the lives of children and young people in custody, with 1 in 8 of the PRT’s sample known to have lost a parent or a sibling. Others from the same sample had experienced the death of a close friend, and several seemed to have been powerfully affected by the loss of another close relative, such as an uncle or grandfather’ (BMA, 2014: 24).

The impact of bereavement on young people can vary, influenced by the intersection of variables such as gender and socio-economic class, individual attributes and family relationships. Akerman & Statham found that, ‘bereavement can be particularly harmful for those who have experienced multiple difficult events or bereavement in disadvantaged circumstances’ (2014: 31). The National Children’s Bureau (2016) found that young people who had suffered the bereavement of a parent were less likely to discuss any anxieties, including those not related to the bereavement, placing them at increased risk of poor mental health wellbeing. Nonetheless positive relationships and attributes ‘may contribute to a level of protection or resilience for some young people’, with some young people able to ‘develop higher expectations for themselves, or find new strengths, while others may be overwhelmed and demotivated, reducing their expectations of life’ (Ribbens McCarthy & Jessop, 2005). Therefore, support services can be especially valuable if family members are not in a position to offer support, where they are bereaved themselves. Underlying the situation is general reluctance to discuss death in broader society, making talking about grief a specialist area rather than an everyday occurrence (Kellehear, 2012). As children spend over six hours per day in

---

<sup>1</sup> See for instance Children and Young People Now: <https://www.cypnow.co.uk/news/article/youth-services-suffer-1bn-funding-cut-in-less-than-a-decade>

school, schools and peers are pivotal to experiences. Projects helping schools support bereaved children have seen positive wellbeing results for children and staff (Birch and Bridge 2018).

### **Local Context: Why Bradford?**

According to the 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation, Bradford ranks as the 5th most income-deprived district in England. While the number of households in Bradford overall reported that they found it difficult/very difficult to manage on their income, not dissimilar to the national average (27%), some wards were experiencing severe deprivation. For instance, 64% residents of the Tong ward found it difficult/very difficult to manage on their income. Nearly 29% of children live below the poverty line, compared to 20% national average. Only 26.8% of the Bradford population have a qualification at NVQ Level 4 and above, compared to 36.8% nationally, and 15% of the population have no qualifications at all, almost double the national average. Such deprivation has an impact on health and wellbeing. Individuals born in Bradford can expect to live 2 years fewer than the national average of 79.5 years for men and 83.2 years for women. However, 'life expectancy is 9.6 years lower for men and 8.7 years lower for women in the most deprived areas of Bradford than in the least deprived areas' (Public Health England, 2014). Infant mortality is one of the highest in England, with a rate of 6.9% compared to 4.1% nationally; that's 1% of babies born dying before they reach the age of 1.\

Despite having some of the highest rates of mortality and morbidity in the UK, public and voluntary services for young people dealing with loss and bereavement in Bradford are scarce. Bradford Bereavement Support (BBS)<sup>2</sup> reported that they were acutely aware of the general lack of bereavement services across Bradford, and that they lacked the capacity to deliver specialised bereavement support for young people in particular. In addition, Child Bereavement UK<sup>3</sup> (which has a regional office based in Bradford) reported that bereavement services for young people in Bradford were dependent on the geographical area they live, with areas recognised as suffering multiple deprivation being able to attract more funding, leaving many young people without timely support<sup>4</sup>.

Given the high levels of deprivation in Bradford, and the potential impact on increased mortality and morbidity, there is a vital need to provide services for young people living

---

<sup>2</sup> Bradford Bereavement Support (BBS) works to strengthen the Bradford community through the provision of bereavement services, providing a range of services for all who experience bereavement for 16 years and above

<sup>3</sup> This organisation provides valuable support on the needs of bereaved young people, nationally. It is also providing local support for young people dealing with bereavement in Bradford, but it has a time-limited funding future.

<sup>4</sup> One bereavement officer stated that for these young people it was "at least a two-year waiting list".

with bereavement now, as well as support the ability of young people to deal more effectively with bereavement in the future, by reducing the stigma attached to talking about death and dying.

## **The Importance of Co-production**

The fact that, when experienced by young people, bereavement is linked to a sense of powerlessness, highlights the need to listen to young people and to value them as experts in their own needs. Young people should be at the centre of decision-making about the resources that would be appropriate and appealing, to get them talking about bereavement, death and dying. Therefore, the project drew on the principles of co-production. Indeed, Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states, 'States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child'<sup>5</sup>. Policy makers and service providers have increasingly recognised the value of the young person's voice - and the expertise of their parents and/or carers - in making decisions about the design and delivery of services for young people (see for instance, Hallett & Prout, 2003). In the UK, The Laming Report and subsequent Children's Act 2004 called for Children's Services to become more open, where 'dialogue, reflection and discussion help shape policy and practice and where contributions from all are encouraged and everyone is valued' (Gasper, 2010: xix). The Lamb Inquiry continued this development, arguing for the need to treat young people 'as equal partners with expertise' in their own needs (2010: 3). Indeed, Kotzee talks about the expertise of lay people as a 'different form' of 'expertise', not one that negates the knowledge and training of professionals and practitioners working with service users, but expertise that supports 'a real and objective ability to accomplish something in the world that enables the expert either to give advice to others, or to act on others' behalf' (2012: 167).

Co-production recognises the value of different "expertises", and the importance of giving the individuals and communities who use welfare services an equal voice in the commissioning and delivery of those services. Advocates of co-production believe that 'greater citizen participation in the provision and delivery' of welfare services has 'the potential to provide significant economic, political and social benefits' (Pestoff 2018: iv). Co-production requires 'negotiation, participation, cooperation....based on compromises and mutual understanding, and a more equitable distribution of power and resources' (Vigoda 2015, p476). For Ostrom, who developed the term, co-production relates to 'inputs from individuals who are not "in" the same organization' and those inputs 'are

---

<sup>5</sup> [https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC\\_united\\_nations\\_convention\\_on\\_the\\_rights\\_of\\_the\\_child.pdf?\\_ga=2.14895030.1845113503.1583247457-1799231783.1583247457](https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_united_nations_convention_on_the_rights_of_the_child.pdf?_ga=2.14895030.1845113503.1583247457-1799231783.1583247457), page 5

transformed into goods and services' (1996: 110, in Durose et al 2017 p136). Thus, co-production demands the 'space and opportunity for individuals to contribute' to finding solutions to local problems where professionals and practitioners 'had previously exercised full control' (Strokosch, 2013 p376). Whilst there is a great deal of debate about the meaning and practice of co-production (Brandsen et al 2018) it is viewed by many theorists as leading to more effective services and potentially empowering service user communities (Strokosch, 2013). This is because, positioned at the top of the 'ladder' of user and carer involvement (Arnstein, 1969), co-production moves beyond simply consulting user communities. Instead it promotes a transformation in the balance of power between service providers and user communities (Keohane, 2009; Pestoff, 2018).

However, co-production has some 'elasticity' as a concept and as a practice (Needham, 2008 p224). This is because it is a term that has been adopted by and applied in a range of public, voluntary and private contexts (Brandsen et al, 2018). Despite its heavy usage in policy circles, the practice of co-production does not always reflect the language and spirit of co-production (Dunston et al, 2009; Steele, 2017) as practitioners frequently lack the resources, opportunities, knowledge – and sometimes the will – to pass responsibility for community services to the communities themselves (Booth 2019). In relation to academic research, co-production denotes a transformation of power between the researchers and those being researched. It implies 'mutual respect, no hierarchy of knowledge forms, fluid and permeable disciplinary and professional boundaries, .....test(ing) knowledge in the context where the application is required and where implementation will take place' (Campbell & Vanderhoven et al, 2016 p12). Therefore, careful reflection during the process of designing services is essential. The participatory mechanisms, as described by Strokosch (2013), offered a model to empower young people, drawing on their expertise as residents in the local community, as students in the local schools and the University, and as individuals living with loss and bereavement. The mechanisms employed centred around reframing the relationship between the professionals - the adults - and the young people.

## **Using Archaeology**

To prompt discussions about death and dying, the experiences of using archaeology as a catalyst to conversations was drawn on, using the work of the Continuing Bonds project (CB)<sup>6</sup>. The Continuing Bonds project (Croucher et al, in prep) used archaeological (case studies of funerary practices from the past) and ethnographic

---

<sup>6</sup> 'Continuing Bonds: Exploring the meaning and legacy of death through past and contemporary practice' was funded by the AHRC, 2016-2018. The Dying to Talk was supported by CB resources and staff time, and was an affiliated project, meeting a CB project objective in liaising/trialling ideas with schools,

examples (from around the world), demonstrating how people in a variety of cultures and time periods responded to death and treated their dead (see Büster et al 2018). Images, films and objects were shown to participants as prompts for discussion. Examples ranged from more familiar topics such as Ancient Egypt mummification and South American 'Day of the Dead' festivals, to more challenging practices, such as the use of the bones of the dead in architectural arrangements in ossuaries, and the circulation of bodily remains in the past, such as in some prehistoric examples, or the plastering of the skulls of ancestors in Neolithic Middle East (e.g. Croucher 2017). The case studies challenged perceptions of what is 'right' or 'normal' around death and dying. Participants, who were health and social care professionals and students, were asked to complete pre and post workshop questionnaires and a follow-on survey 1-3 months later, to gauge changes in their perceptions. Of the post-workshop questionnaire responders, 93% believed that archaeological materials can be used to facilitate discussions and/or training about death, dying, bereavement and loss. For most, the follow-up questionnaire identified considerable personal and professional impacts of the workshop. The project also found that the workshops helped participants to reflect on differences in cultural attitudes to death and dying, with 83% saying the workshop helped them think differently about death, dying and bereavement. 81% of the respondents remembered archaeological case studies, affected by how interesting and emotive they perceived the material, and over half agreed the workshop would impact on their approaches to death, dying and bereavement in professional practice (Croucher et al in prep).

As archaeology reminds us, our families, friends and communities 'have always cared for the dying' (Kellehear, 2012 p 2), although people respond to death in a variety of ways. We found that archaeology presented an opportunity to talk openly, prompted by material which was fascinating yet distanced from personal experience and therefore a "safe" way in. When presented with images of other practices, participants quickly moved from talking about the past, to talking about their own experiences and those of people close to them. Drawing on the Continuing Bonds study as a starting point, the Dying to Talk work investigated whether the same strategy could be used with young people, using the safe and distant past to prompt conversations. It was anticipated that this approach would allow young people to be active agents in the process of exploring bereavement, allowing them more power in the process, and reducing risks of negative outcomes associated with bereavement (Ribbens McCarthy, 2007).

## **Aims and Objectives**

Given the context of the challenges to discussing death and bereavement, this project aimed to use archaeology and co-production as tools to equip young people to discuss



death and bereavement, building their resilience to future loss. We aimed to co-produce a tool kit to aid this discussion, which could be used in a school setting, along with designing a 'Festival of the Dead' to promote the discussion of death and bereavement for young people.

#### Project objectives:

To recruit young people to co-produce a resource, using archaeological materials and case studies, to help young people to discuss death, dying and bereavement.

To use this resource in a 'Festival of the Dead' for school children, delivered by our ambassadors, to aid conversations about death and bereavement.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the use of archaeology, and the resource, in encouraging discussion and comfort around death, dying and bereavement.

To evaluate and reflect on the process of adults (practitioners and academics) working co-productively with young people

## Methodology

Our methods cover our recruitment; production of a video resource; use of the resource and related activities in a Festival of the Dead; and our evaluation of the ambassadors, project partners, Festival of the Dead participants (school children and teachers), and effectiveness of using archaeology to discuss death with young people. In order to draw on the expertise of voluntary sector organisations in relation to bereavement, a working group was formed with BBS and Child Bereavement UK, and with 2 other local groups who had expertise working with young people: Making Your Mind Up (MYMUP)<sup>7</sup>, a local organisation offering web based digital resources promoting wellbeing and self-care for young people; and Speakers Corner, a voluntary group who work to empower young people in Bradford.

### Recruitment of Ambassadors and Establishment of Working Group

15 young ambassadors were recruited in total, aged between 16-24 years. 8 were young people recruited from local schools, through MYMUP's school networks. In addition, 7 psychology students were recruited from the University of Bradford. Of these, only one ambassador was male. The recruitment process within the University was restricted to psychology students, as they would have some insight into mental health

---

<sup>7</sup> MYMUP is a community interest company based in Bradford that base their work on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs addressing the 7 levels of needs digitally to achieve self-actualisation. MYMUP works with young people, including provision of web-based resources to enhance mental health and wellbeing for young people.

and wellbeing that could be utilised in the co-production of project outputs. It would provide the students with an opportunity to apply academic knowledge, embedding their learning and enhancing their employability skills (Reddy, Lance and Hulme, 2011). Recruitment adverts were circulated via email and through their Virtual Learning Environment. To recruit the ambassadors, an advertisement was circulated by MYMUP to the young people they work with, and their local school networks, with some schools putting the advert in their student newsletter. Recruitment within the community was managed by MYMUP and Speakers Corner. As the project only had capacity to fund 16 ambassadors the young people who applied had to write, or film, a short statement about why they were interested in participating in a project about death and dying. In the selection process we were particularly keen to recruit young people who had personal experience of bereavement, giving them some “expertise” to draw on. In total, 19 applications for involvement were received and 15 ambassadors were appointed. These young ambassadors joined the project Working Group, together with a staff member from MYMUP, a staff member from Child Bereavement UK, a staff member from Bradford Bereavement Support (BBS) and 3 academics (the authors of this paper: 2 academics from University of Bradford and one from the University of Wolverhampton); all took part in the co-production aspect of the project. Five of the staff members were female. Again, only 1 practitioner was male. All of the staff were Disclosure and Barring Service checked.

### **Think-in 1: initial discussion**

Discussion of archaeological artefacts and funerary pieces. How does it relate to now?

*7 UoB ambassadors, 5 community ambassadors*

### **Think-in 2: Death Café and designing the tools**

Death Café carried out. Discussion of how archaeological artefacts and funerary pieces could be translated into a film and online tools.

*3 UoB ambassadors, 8 community ambassadors*

### **First video shoot**

Using the archaeological artefacts and information, initial filming for the video took place with the ambassadors.

*3 UoB ambassadors, 6 community ambassadors*

### **Think-in 3 Editing and further ideas for filming**

Identifying items for editing in the video. Further discussion of filming items needed.

*2 UoB ambassadors, 6 community ambassadors*

### **Think-in 4: Editing and further ideas for filming**

Identifying items for editing in the video. Further discussion of filming items needed.

*1 UoB ambassador, 5 community ambassadors*

### **Think-in 5: Final filming**

Further filming took place in Bradford City Centre and identified further areas for editing.

*1 UoB ambassador, 3 community ambassadors*

### **Think-in 6: Final edit and 'Festival of the Dead' preparation**

*3 UoB ambassadors, 2 community ambassadors*

### **Festival of the Dead event at University of Bradford for local school**

*3 UoB ambassadors, 3 archaeology students assisting with presentation of archaeological tools, 3 community ambassadors*

### **Local School visit with 'Festival of the Dead'**

*3 UoB ambassadors, 3 archaeology students assisting with presentation of 2 archaeological tools, 3 community ambassadors*

**Figure 1: Schematic diagram of the project procedure**

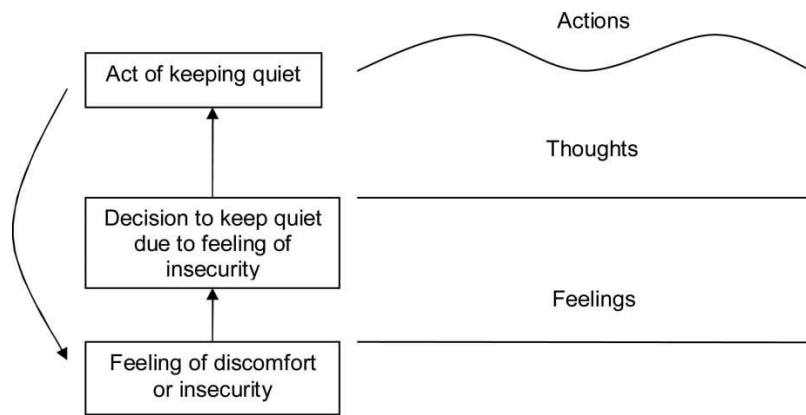
### **Co-producing Project Resources**

The Working Group came together to design and produce the video and materials for the Festival of the Dead; “Think-ins”, rather than formal “meetings” were used<sup>8</sup>. The Think-Ins created open and safe spaces for all participants to talk and share their opinions, with no formal roles, such as a chair. Participants frequently worked in smaller sub-groups to develop different aspects of the project – with the young people choosing which group they wanted to move into - which also served to enhance the ability of some of the young people to contribute who were less confident in the larger group. The intention was to avoid what Jupp Kina (2012) calls ‘the disjuncture in the dialogical relationship between what we feel, think and do’. Six think-ins and 2 filming sessions were run (see Fig. 1).

Not all ambassadors and staff members were present at every think-in, due to other commitments, such as work/school priorities, caring commitments or illness. We adopted the method of co-production within the design of the project tools. Firstly, given the power relationship between adults and young people, and lay people and academics, it was decided to “employ” and pay the young people to be “ambassadors”. In this way all of the participants in the Working Group (responsible for the design of the project resources) were paid for their time and expertise. Secondly, at the request of the young ambassadors, the second think-in of the project Working Group was in the ‘Death Café’ (Impermanence 2016) format. In this forum all participants could share their experiences, thoughts and emotions about death, dying, loss and bereavement, reflecting Kellehear’s (2012) motivation that members of a compassionate community should support each other by talking about death. The young people felt this was important as, in the words of one young ambassador, we needed to “practice what we preach”. However, it also served to allow ‘the intellectual current to acknowledge the emotional’, important not only because of the sensitivity of the subject matter, but also in challenging the cultural barriers between adults and young people, to enable ‘more transparent’ decision-making (Jupp Kina, 2012 p216). The Death Cafe “levelled the playing field”, both adults and young people; providers of education and students; youth leaders and youths sharing the common experience of grief and the prospect of death.

---

<sup>8</sup> Inspired by Speakers Corner ‘Women of the World’ planning events.



**Figure 2 Diagram representing the disjuncture in the dialogical relationship between what we feel, think and do (Jupp Kina, 2012: 215)**

Using “enhanced” co-production would enable young people to be at the forefront of the creation of the project resources. By drawing on young people’s perspectives, such as the most accessible means of communication and the barriers to young people talking about death and dying, the project would be more likely to succeed in engaging - and meeting the needs of - young people. By co-producing activities it would enhance the likelihood of those activities being engaging and accessible to young people, and allow investigation into the benefits of and barriers to co-production between adults and young people. It would also present the opportunity to assess the potential impact of a proactive approach to talking about death and dying, aimed at enhancing future wellbeing - finding sustainable ways of supporting young people living with bereavement - as well as enhancing understanding on the conditions necessary to work co-productively with young people in the future.

### **Delivering the Festival of the Dead**

In addition to the recruited ambassadors, 3 archaeology students (2 males and 1 female) were employed to help in the delivery of the Festival of the Dead with schools.

A two hour *Festival of the Dead* was held in Gallery II at the University of Bradford, attended by 22 Year 9 and 10 students (14-15 years) and 3 teachers, followed by a 2 hour *Festival of the Dead* held at a local School for children with emotional, social and behavioural needs, attended by 8 children and 2 teachers.

## Materials for the Festival of the Dead

The name 'Festival of the Dead' for the school engagement events was a deliberate choice, chosen in collaboration between project ambassadors and staff precisely because it already had a cultural context, using a celebration which was already familiar to the ambassadors<sup>9</sup>. The name aptly described the content of the event – challenging the taboo of talking about death – rather than using commonly used euphemisms which play into the taboo. The young ambassadors designed and filmed a 17-minute interactive video and resource pack of activities for the Festival. Guided by the academic staff, they used archaeology and CB resources as a foundation for the video and resources. In addition, at their instigation, the ambassadors expanded the content to include contemporary experience, including personal accounts of bereavement given by the ambassadors. The video was then trialed with two secondary schools in Bradford, through a 'Festival of the Dead'. The video included pauses, with on screen prompts - allowing the school groups to discuss their thoughts, reactions and opinions to each section of the video. This was followed by a range of activities (run by the Dying to Talk ambassadors) including laying out a replica skeleton, death Jenga, painting death masks, *Day of the Dead* face paint, making a funeral song playlist, creating a cremation tattoo, modelling grave goods, designing your own coffin, and participating in a *Death Café*. There was also the opportunity to view and discuss some of the archaeological case studies used in the *Continuing Bonds* workshops, and the Festival and drew on materials (such as poetry and drawings) from the *Continuing Bonds' Dying Matters Awareness Week* 2018 exhibition.

## Evaluation

At the beginning of the project, ambassadors were given a semi-structured questionnaire to find out whether they had ever experienced bereavement, if they had ever sought support for bereavement and how they felt about using archaeology to engage young people in conversations about death. We also asked them what they thought about the steps we took in the project to support the co-production of project resources. The ambassadors were asked to complete questionnaires after each Think-In until Think-In 4, to evaluate whether the project was impacting on how comfortable they felt talking about death and whether they thought use of archaeological tools were proving useful to prompt young people to talk about death. The Ambassadors were given a final questionnaire after the Festival of the Dead<sup>10</sup>. Questionnaires were also given to the school pupils and the teachers following the Festival of the Dead to

---

<sup>9</sup> The ambassadors talked extensively about the Pixar animation film "Coco" released in 2017 which was based on the Mexican holiday "Day of the Dead".

<sup>10</sup> Due to the repetition of the questions and the plateauing of the answers we did not survey the ambassadors for Think-Ins 5-6

determine the effectiveness of the event. All data were collected using questionnaires with closed question format (5-point Likert scale response format, or tick box response format) and open-ended formats.

## Results

### Characterisation of ambassador experience

From the first questionnaire it was found that 60% of the ambassadors had prior experience of bereavement. Only 1 of these had received any support (medication, therapy and family support). 100% of respondents believed there was not enough support for young people. The ambassadors varied in their reporting of what types of support they would like to see. These were: group therapy (30%); individual therapy (35%); Mentoring (30%); Online resources (20%); Information leaflets (less than 10%); and a telephone helpline (less than 10%). Of the respondents 8 said they knew where they could get support from. This included: School and college (20%); Bradford Bereavement Service (less than 10%); Counselling service at university or school (20%); First Response (less than 10%); Samaritans (15%); Childline (less than 10%); Noah's Ark Charity (less than 10%); Youth club (less than 10%); GP (less than 10%); 1 ambassador said they did not know where to access support for bereavement for young people.

Table 1: Mean (SD) on level of agreement (out of 5) of the ambassadors over the progression of the project

	Think-in 1	Think-in 2	Think-in 3	Think-in 4
<b>I have had conversations recently about death and bereavement outside of the think-in?</b>	2.62 (1.19)	2.60 (0.84)	3.88 (1.36)	3.40 (1.52)

	Think-in 1	Think-in 2	Think-in 3	Think-in 4
<b>Are you comfortable talking about death?</b>	3.71 (0.91)	3.60 (1.08)	4.13 (0.84)	4.00 (0.00)
<b>Does Archaeology help people to talk about death?</b>	3.54 (0.88)	4.10 (0.57)	4.13 (0.35)	4.20 (0.45)

In terms of level of comfort in talking about death, at the beginning of the project the ambassadors reported a relatively high level of comfort in discussing death (See Table 1), and had had a moderate amount of conversations about death (see Table 2 for who conversations of death were held with). Over the course of the project comfort level in discussing death generally increased and there was also an increase in the numbers of conversations they had on the subject of death, dying and bereavement. Interestingly, those conversations were predominantly with their peer group (friends and siblings), supporting the research literature. The ambassadors also reported a shift in the way they thought about death over the project, reporting that their views on death had changed, but they did not elucidate on this point further. In addition, the ambassadors were positive about the efficacy of using archaeology to discuss death with this increasing over time.

Table 2: Number of ambassadors who had conversations about death with different groups of people



Think-in 1	Think-in 2	Think-in 3	Think-in 4
Counsellor / Medical professional (2)	Counsellor / Medical professional (1)	Counsellor / Medical professional (1)	
Friend (5)	Friend (5)	Friend (6)	Friend (6)
Parent/carer (5)	Parent/carer (2)	Parent/carer (4)	Parent/carer (4)
Sibling (4)	Sibling (4)	Sibling (7)	Sibling (7)
		Teacher (1)	

### **Evaluation of the Festival of the Dead**

The Festival of the Dead was well received by teachers and pupils alike (see Table 3). Initially, the pupils reported not being very comfortable talking about death. At the end of the Festival they reported that the archaeological case studies and the video had been good tools to prompt those conversations. The pupils reported liking the video, and the teachers confirmed this. Some of the comments from the pupils included:

*“Very useful because it breaks the idea that people have to suffer in silence.”*

*“Archaeological findings have helped us understand how people dealt [sic] with death through history”*

*“The case studies help you to tune in to your emotions. Also this will help other people going through bereavement as it will help them manage their emotions.”*

These comments demonstrate that the Festival had a substantial impact upon the young people, helping them to identify their emotions, talk about these feelings and being empowered to do this in this supportive environment. The pupils also enjoyed the Dying to Talk video:

*“Everybody greives [sic] differently. That death is inevitable but that doesn't mean it needs to be sad”*

*“I learnt that it is okay to talk about death and say the words die or dead without feeling bad”*

*“I learned that death isn't about the dead, it's about coming together and caring for each other”*

*“That everybody deals with death differently and you should always be nice to somebody who has lost someone.”*

Thus, the video led to some insightful remarks from the young people with regards to appreciating the differences in the ways people grieve and that people should be supportive of one another. They also confirmed that it was acceptable to talk about death.

Table 3 - Mean (SD) agreement (out of 5) of the students, teachers and ambassadors who took part in the Festival of the Dead

	<b>Pupils</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Ambassadors</b>
<b>I have had conversations recently about death and bereavement outside the Festival of Death</b>	2.04 (0.95)	4.00 (0.63)	-
<b>Are you comfortable talking about death and bereavement?</b>	3.56 (1.06)	4.00 (0.71)	4.63 (0.48)
<b>Are/were you comfortable talking about death and bereavement with the students?</b>	-	4.75 (0.43)	4.45 (0.66)
<b>Did you enjoy the Dying to Talk video?</b>	4.35 (0.56)	4.50 (0.50)	4.27 (0.45)
<b>How successful do you think the video will be in raising awareness about death, dying and bereavement?</b>	3.69 (0.79)	4.60 (0.49)	4.45 (0.50)

	<b>Pupils</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Ambassadors</b>
<b>Level of agreement that archaeological case studies about death and burial are helpful in getting people to talk about/think about death</b>	4.07 (0.83)	4.00 (0.00)	4.63 (0.48)
<b>Do you think the students enjoyed the Dying to Talk video?</b>	-	4.00 (0.00)	4.27 (0.45)

Describing the Festival of the Dead, the majority of pupils found it “interesting”, “thought-provoking”, “relevant”, “worthwhile” and “enjoyable” (see Table 4). The teachers found the festival “thought-provoking”, “relevant” and “interesting”. Interestingly, the pupils and teachers did not find the Festival of the Dead too emotional or upsetting, with the exception of a small group (13%) of students who had recently experienced a close bereavement and were supported in the Festival to be able to talk about their experiences.

Table 4 - Frequency of words selected to describe the Festival of the Dead by students, teachers and ambassadors.

	<b>Pupils</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Ambassadors</b>
Relevant	14	3	3
Interesting	21	2	5
Thought-provoking	15	4	6
Inspiring	8	1	4
Worthwhile	14	1	5
Productive	8	1	4
Enjoyable	14	1	9
Empowering	5	1	7
Moving	4	0	2
Boring	2	0	0
Irrelevant	1	0	0
Sad	4	0	1
Distressing (*Death café)	3	0	1
Other (creative, 'shrekstastic')	2	0	1

All the teachers and ambassadors, and 87% of pupils thought that the activities at the Festival were age appropriate, with only 1 student disagreeing and 2 “did not know”. When asked about the appropriateness of the activities:

*“Nothing was sugar coated and it felt like a mature discussion.”*

*“Good to talk about death and not shi[e]ld children”*

*“It was educational and fun”*

However, there were some less positive responses: *“Some elements were. But I would've (personally) preferred a more academic approach”*, *“Some activities may be seen as too old”*, whereas others thought that the activities *“were childish”*.

When asked how useful the pupils found the activities:

*“It helps us express our thoughts and feelings in an engaging and enlightening [sic] way.”*

*“Very because people shared things that were on their chest”*

*“Very valuable- your [sic] teaching people that death isn't taboo and shouldn't be seen as one.”*

This demonstrates that the activities served their intended purpose of stimulating conversations about death, providing an open and supportive space for the young people to express their thoughts. When asked about how important they thought engaging young people in such discussions about death, a real need for these types of activities and discussions were apparent:

*“Very to give people more understanding of what to do or where to go”*

*“Death can be confusing for a lot of people so the more information and help out there the better”*

*“Its very important coz [sic] some familys [sic] don't discuss it”*

*“Its [sic] valuable because it gave a wide experience on death”*

The teachers were also positive about the Festival and the activities reporting: *“The energy created was very positive and the difference of opinions and practice shared created an environment where our learners were able to talk about their own*

*experiences”, and that the young people “... learnt that they can talk about death in a non-morbid way”. The teachers also commented on how valuable they thought the Festival was for their students: “It was valuable because you created a fun environment to talk about death and burial even though it is not a fun topic to talk about” and “this opportunity can help the person with future events which involve death and bereavement”. They said that such events are “Really important- prepares them for future experiences and/or helps them deal with previous ones”. In terms of the utility of the Festival and activities, teachers commented that the activities “Shows interesting historical view. Not personal.” and “It depersonalises death and makes it more normal part of life”. Thus encouragingly, “Teens have learnt practical steps in dealing with death more openly” and learning “That death is a normal part of life.”*

### **Evaluation of the process of co-producing project resources**

We were keen to find out how the young people felt about their role in the project, and whether they felt empowered by the adoption of co-production guiding the relationship between adults and the young people. At the start of the project all participants attended an introductory meeting which included a presentation on the principles of co-production, and a group discussion about how to implement these principles. This was also designed to provide some rules of engagement for all co-producers, to remind the adults that they were not “in charge”.

In the final questionnaire, 100% of the young people agreed that the project implemented co-production “totally” or “somewhat” <sup>11</sup>, with 12 out of the 15 ambassadors (80%) feeling their ideas “totally” influenced project outputs and outcomes as they were able to contribute as much as they wanted to. This is likely because the relationship between adults and young people was nurtured throughout the project. The working group team communicated regularly through WhatsApp chat - this was used to ask questions, to make suggestions and set meeting dates. We held “social” events, such as meals at a local restaurant, inviting the ambassadors to university events they may be interested in and bringing tea and cakes to the Think-Ins. We started all Think-Ins with a “what has your week been like?” conversation starter directed at all participants (adults and young people) to enhance the sense of belonging, encouraging

---

<sup>11</sup> It has to be noted that the ambassadors were unsure about the meaning of co-production when asked about it in the initial questionnaires, reporting a mean of 1.86 (out of 5) in their understanding of the term. This reported low level of understanding remained low by Think-in 4, only reaching 1.90 (out of 5). However, this is contradicted by the qualitative data from the open-end questions in the final questionnaire, suggesting that they did not understand academic definitions of the term, but they did feel they experienced it in practice throughout the project.

and valuing all contributions, and nurturing the confidence of the young people to speak in a group.

The final questionnaire revealed that all the young ambassadors felt that confidence was an essential factor in the achievements of the project, confirming Jupp Kina's theory that young people will 'make the decision' to not participate if they feel insecure or uncomfortable (2012: 215). In relation to how we enhanced that confidence in the project all the ambassadors reported that they felt a valued part of the team. They also reported that future projects should ensure young people take "the main role" in the project and "never isolate them from anything", communicate "without any barriers", "giving them a role structuring the project" and allowing them "to talk openly". In order to ensure an equal relationship between adults and young people, which was prioritised by all respondents, it was felt that it was the adults' responsibility to have the right "attitude" by "talking personally rather than as an authoritarian figure", with "equal chances in creating ideas". Indeed, the building of "casual" relationships, rather than ones based on professionalism, was identified as being an important part of this project and should be repeated in future projects. As an academic team we injected humour into the Think-Ins, by sharing humorous stories during our conversation-starter, and finding humour in some of the funerary practices we discussed. This created a more enjoyable and relaxing atmosphere.

The issue of training young people to work with adults/ professionals was not deemed important, with only 5 ambassadors (30%) saying this was very important. The ambassadors did not feel that a signed agreement about working co-productively was important. Instead the ambassadors reported that the "attitude" of the professionals/ adults was more important in supporting young people to feel empowered. However, the ambassadors liked the idea of having a formal recognition of their involvement, such as a certificate, with 90% of ambassadors seeing this as "important" or "very important". As one respondent said, "I want to show off"!

## **Discussion**

In conversation with local groups supporting young people in Bradford it was apparent that provision to support young people living with bereavement was inadequate. To respond to this gap in services, this project co-produced a video resource to aid discussions about death, dying and bereavement using co-production methods, and inspired by archaeological material. In addition, the Festival of the Dead helped young people in their ability to talk about death, empowering them to discuss difficult topics, evidenced by their taking conversations outside of the project and feeling more comfortable discussing what can be a societally-challenging subject.

The project was a multidisciplinary one, drawing on the experiences of researchers, with backgrounds in sociology, psychology and archaeology. In addition, it embraced multi-agency support, seeking the expertise of local voluntary groups working with young people, namely Child Bereavement UK, Bradford Bereavement Support, Speakers Corner, and MYMUP. These groups reported that, despite research showing the lasting impact of loss for young people, funding for bereavement services is lacking. As one practitioner stated,

*“The funders are not thinking about the knock-on effects of bereavement. It’s every other aspect you can’t see – ‘the unseen aspects of death’. ...the mental health, academic achievement, attendance....because often the funding is limited to... ..“We’re funding an asylum seeker project” or “we’re funding a mental health project” ... and the outcomes are... you have to fit in... and that’s the problem with austerity, people chase the money.”*

The digital resource, filmed and co-produced by the young ambassadors and project partners, and the activities for a Festival of the Dead, were well received by the schools, both pupils and teachers. The project confirmed that ‘they were...much more effective in getting messages across to their peers than an adult could’ (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012: 1135). In light of reduced access to face-to-face bereavement services, an accessible online resource would be a useful means of reaching young people, although it is ideal when used in a supported environment. The evaluations revealed an increased confidence of the young participants in talking about death and dying. However this increase in confidence, in future projects, would need to be mapped over time for durability. Using diverse examples of treatment of the dead and dealing with bereavement from across the world and through time opened up the topic for discussion. The resources were particularly valued by teachers as a method of engaging young people who may be bereaved, as well as facilitating a school environment more at ease with conversations about death and dying.

However, there were areas that did not fulfil the conditions for co-production. The young people took charge of the filming of the video, creating the script and the storyboard, and designing the resources for the Festival of the Dead. However, some of the content for the video, specifically the use of archaeology, and the decision to trial the resources at local schools, had been decided on because of the “expertise’ of the practitioners and academics involved in this project.

The practice of co-production can be hard to navigate, particularly in view of the power differentials between service providers and service users and, in this case, between adults and young people. As Rowlands argues, an authentic approach to engaging

communities requires observation of the barriers that prohibit empowerment which are in our control, and recognition of those obstacles beyond our control (1998:17). Thus, for this project, 'enhanced co-production...achieved through the use of participative mechanisms' would have been more likely to support a 'deeper engagement' (Strokosch, 2013: 377) of young people which could strengthen the effectiveness of project outcomes, as well as empowering the young people to become active citizens in the future (Burgess & Durrant, 2018). Therefore, this project learned that it is important to be mindful of the 'subjective and subtle ways that both emotion and power are played out within participatory processes within both research and practice' (Jupp Kina, 2012: 202). Professionals working with young people must recognise the power differential between adults and young people and adopt practices that enhance the equality of opportunity to influence service design; what Friere calls having 'constant vigilance over ourselves' (2001, in Jupp Kina, 2012: 216). Sometimes that was manifest in the simple gesture of "who holds the pen".

Indeed, what was not anticipated was the deference that the young people frequently paid to the adults. As Verschuere et al state, 'citizens are not like a "jack-in-the-box", just waiting for someone to push a lever that will immediately release their energies and result in their engagement in...co-production' (2012: 1088). What is more, it was often challenging for the staff members on the project to help in facilitation (in terms of keeping to time and cost) without impacting on the power-dynamics of the working group. This is something that needs to be reviewed in future projects. The project outputs are likely to have been different if the young people had been the driving force from the inception of the project. However, for Brandsen & Honingh, this is the distinction between co-production and co-creation, 'when citizens are involved in the general planning of a service—perhaps even initiating it—then this is co-creation, whereas if they shape the service during later phases of the cycle it is co-production' (2018: 13). One of the practitioners agreed,

*"It is not about letting them just go off and do it by themselves and really come up with everything. They might not know what the parameters are....they'll need...kind of support. Like they wouldn't have known about any of the archaeology stuff, would they? They wouldn't have known... the routes we can actually take, or the networks into schools and all that...they'd have limitations. So if we all work together in partnership ...we can all bring what we've got...to the table...that's my kind of ideal".*

Although the young people were not involved in the co-design of the initial parameters of the project, there were many occasions when our contributions, as professional and academic members of the project team, were limited to a supporting role; the young



people were co-producers. For instance, the suggestion to use Facebook to engage young people was vetoed by the young ambassadors who reported that young people are more likely to use Instagram and Snapchat. Furthermore, the expertise of professionals was frequently sought by the young people to help them make evidence-based decisions about project outcomes. By sharing our expertise as academics, the power gradually shifted from the adults to the young ambassadors, not only becoming more comfortable talking about death and dying, but also gaining confidence working in a room of multi-agency professionals.

Working with young people was a learning experience for the project team, and the learning was undoubtedly two-way. It was enlightening hearing perspectives of young peoples' life and grief today. However, it was apparent that it is challenging to shift the power dynamic and to fully empower young people - having closer involvement of young people in the bid writing may help to counter this, along with clearer briefing about the roles of the academic team at the outset. There were differing minimal outputs for academic and professional team members (one focusing on co-production, one on the use of archaeology, one of volunteers, one on the production of resource/video) meaning the project was co-produced rather than co-designed. Nonetheless, the results demonstrate the value felt by the young ambassadors, school learners, teachers and project team, and the team has learnt from the process which will feed into future projects.

While there were limitations (see below), the project demonstrated the potential benefits of a collaborative approach in tackling the taboos around death and dying. Future work should involve a longer-term evaluation of the impact of the project on the wellbeing of the young people: the ambassadors themselves; and the pupils using the resources (and their teachers/parents). Initial evaluation indicates that the project aims were met and that the resources were well received and have the potential to build wellbeing and resilience. Whilst the project measured the impact of the project on the confidence of the young ambassadors to talk about death and dying, the project did not directly measure any change in the 'powerlessness' (Ribbens McCarthy, 2007) before and after engaging with the project resources. Future projects should include these measures more explicitly.

## **Limitations**

There were a number of limitations to the project and its evaluation. Firstly, there were aspects of the project that did not reflect the practice of co-production (as discussed above). Secondly, student ambassadors were self-selecting, chosen from an open application which likely attracted those who already had an interest and some level of

confidence in discussing death. Thirdly, whilst there was a diversity of ambassadors in terms of ethnicity, with a strong BAME representation, there was only one male ambassador. In future it would be important to ensure an even gender balance to ensure the male perspective is represented. However, a gender balance of pupils trialing the resources at the Festival of the Dead was achieved. Fourthly, some ambassadors did not attend all the Think-Ins and thus evaluations of their ability to influence project outputs – as well as their confidence talking about death - may have been negatively affected. Finally, the evaluation relied on self-reporting and thus the answers given, even though anonymised, may have been from exaggeration, with the young ambassadors reporting higher levels of efficacy because of their close affinity with the academic staff and practitioners.

## Conclusion

This project confirmed that co-producing bereavement services with young people and local voluntary organisations offers the potential to enhance their sense of agency in talking about death and dying. Adults making decisions about young people are in danger of not reflecting their worldview, particularly around a sensitive topic such as death, prohibiting young people having 'their emotions....acknowledged' and having 'nowhere to express them, or talk about them' (Ribbens McCarthy, 2007 p292). This project provided some confirmation that young people are more likely to speak to their peers than seek counselling or support with paid professionals. Future projects should reflect this. Indeed, the places that young people might have occupied, such as youth clubs and community projects, which brought them into contact with their peer group as well as welfare professionals, have all but disappeared in austerity, leaving less spaces for their needs to be noticed and their voices heard. Whilst the project was conceived before the recent pandemic, the impact of COVID 19 on mental health and wellbeing adds further pressure to resources for young people. As one of the voluntary sector partners stated,

*"You only have to go to a meeting with the... people that make the decisions....to know they don't understand what's actually happening down on the shop floor because they've never actually been down into an estate in Bradford, and see whatever is...affecting their lives, whether bereavement or whatever ...they don't get a real gist of what's happening in the communities..... it comes down to the business decision of the person at the top who maybe doesn't understand".*

The use of archaeology as a safe facilitator to conversations around death and dying with young people was evidenced in the project, demonstrating the valuable "way in" that thinking about other cultures through time can bring. By highlighting the wide

variety of different approaches to dealing with death and bereavement, societal norms are challenged, and, prompted by curiosity, conversations are sparked about the past, about practices today, and around personal experience. Furthermore, by involving students as ambassadors in the co-production of the project outputs, they were able to apply their undergraduate studies to a real situation, gaining working experience of voluntary service provision, as well as working alongside young people from the local community. Student engagement has the potential to support and enhance local services, whilst enhancing their citizenship and making their subject learning more meaningful and enhancing their ability to work co-productively in the future (UNESCO, 2014; Booth, in press).

Drawing on Jupp Kina (2012), it was hoped this project would not only contribute to the longer term aim of enhancing the future wellbeing of young people through building resilience, but to empower them to take a more proactive approach to talking about death and build their own means to provide and receive mutual support – reflecting the principles of the Compassionate City. The project illustrated the criticality of the young person's voice in designing resources that will successfully engage young people. However, working in partnership requires a shift of power and resources away from professionals, the institutions, the funders, the researchers, "us". Indeed, as the project progressed, we, as professionals and adults, often had to audit ourselves and reflect on how some of our practice reverted to the "default" power differential between adults and young people; service providers and service users. To empower young people, not only to develop a more effective service but to also develop their confidence to be more empowered citizens in the future, requires a change in the praxis and culture of working; in the way we position, talk to – and about – young people. In any project or activity working to support young people, this necessitates 'constant vigilance' (Friere 2001). Whether it is called co-production or co-creation (Brandsen et al, 2018), the voices of young people need to be embedded in the foundations of compassionate communities.

Co-production requires partnerships 'founded on mutual respect, and recognising that expertise is not just sited in educational institutions, but that local communities, organisations, and citizens also have great expertise and knowledge' (Stone 2015: 9). In order for co-production to be a motif for a more inclusive decision-making process which draws on young people's expertise and worldview, practitioners need to engage young people in 'a collaborative, iterative process of shared learning' (Campbell & Vanderhoven, 2016: 12). For this process of co-producing services not only enhances the design of services but also has the potential to empower. In the words of a voluntary sector partner:

*“..having mental health problems, so, struggling... wanting to kill themselves, wanting to hurt themselves...they’ve got this, you know, kind of worth that participation gives them. And it’s that peer support, you know, that participation and co-production brings: you’re doing something together as a unit... participation; co-production... is the best type of therapeutic intervention you can ever give somebody...”.*

Given the devastating potential impacts of childhood bereavement, embedding in our young people the skills to talk, share and reflect on their experiences will normalise talking about death and bereavement, in time it will build resilience and equip future generations with the skills to talk openly about death and challenge the societal taboos that currently exist. This is particularly poignant in the era of COVID-19. With the death rate rising in the UK - and across the world - as a result of COVID-19, young people may not only find themselves affected directly by the loss of a loved one, but also having to engage with the intense media attention about the threat of death that this virus poses. Thus our next steps continue with the agenda of generating a model, based on Kellehear’s “Compassionate City”, for young people in Bradford and beyond; responding to what is now an imperative to support young people to deal with the concept of death, both theoretically and personally. A model capable of engaging young people in conversations about death, dying and bereavement, that organisations such as schools and youth groups can adopt to enhance the present and future wellbeing of young people, is needed now more than ever.

## **Bibliography**

Akerman, R. & Statham, J. (2014). Bereavement in Childhood: the impact on psychological and educational outcomes and the effectiveness of support services’, Research Working Paper 25, London: Institute of Education. Accessed: [http://www.cwrc.ac.uk/news/documents/Revised\\_Childhood\\_Bereavement\\_review\\_2014a.pdf](http://www.cwrc.ac.uk/news/documents/Revised_Childhood_Bereavement_review_2014a.pdf)

Aynsley-Green, A. (2017). Think adult—think child! Why should staff caring for dying adults ask what the death means for children in the family?, *British Medical Bulletin*, Volume 123, 1, 5–17. DOI [10.1093/bmb/idx026](https://doi.org/10.1093/bmb/idx026)

Birch, K. & Bridge, H. (2018). P-7 The atlas programme for schools: supporting children to navigate their way through bereavement, *British Medical Journal Supportive & Palliative Care*, 8: A12-A13.

Booth, J. (2019). Empowering Disadvantaged Communities in UK: Missing the Potential of Co-production, *Social Change*, 49, 2, 276—292.

Booth, J. (in press). Becoming a Global Citizen? Developing Community-facing Learning in the Social Sciences, *Learning and Teaching*.

Bovaird, T. & Loeffler, E. (2012). From Engagement to Co-production: The Contribution of Users and Communities to Outcomes and Public Value, *Voluntas*, 23(4), 1119—1138. DOI 10.1007/s11266-012-9309-6.

Brandsen, T. & Honingh, M. (2018) 'Definitions of Co-production and Co-creation', in Brandsen, T., Steen, T., & Verschuere, B. *Co-Production and Co-Creation : Engaging Citizens in Public Services*. New York, NY: Routledge, 9—16.

Brandsen, T., Steen, T., and Verschuere, B. (eds.) (2018). *Co-production and Co-creation: engaging citizens in public services*, London, Routledge.

Burgess, G. and Durrant, D. (2018). Reciprocity in the Co-production of Public Services: The Role of Volunteering through Community Time Exchange, *Social Policy and Society*, 1—16. doi:10.1017/S1474746418000076.

Büster, L., Croucher, K., Dayes, J., Faull, C. and Green, L. (2018). From Plastered Skulls to Palliative Care: What the Past Can Teach Us About Dealing with Death, in H. Williams and L. Richardson (eds.) *Death in the Contemporary World: Perspectives from Public Archaeology*, *AP Online Journal of Public Archaeology Special Issue 3*.

Campbell, H. and Vanderhoven, D. (2016). N8/ESRC Research Programme: Knowledge That Matters: Realising the Potential of Co-Production, Manchester, N8 Research Partnership.

Croucher, K. (2017). Keeping the dead close: grief and bereavement in the treatment of skulls from the Neolithic Middle East. *Mortality*, 1—18.

Croucher, K., Büster, L., Dayes, J., Green, L., Raynsford, J., and C. Faull. (In prep) *Archaeology and contemporary death: Using the past to provoke, challenge and engage*. Submitted to *Plos ONE*

Gasper, M. (2010). *Multi-agency Working in Early Years: Challenges and Opportunities*, London, Sage.

Hallett, C. & Prout, A. (eds.) (2003) *Children Taken Seriously in Theory, Policy and Practice: Social Policy for a New Century*, London: Routledge Falmer.

Harrison, L. and Harrington, R. (2001). Adolescents' Bereavement Experiences: Prevalence, Association with Depressive Symptoms, and Use of Services, *Journal of Adolescence*, 24 (2), 159—69.

Holland, John (2001) *Understanding Children's Experiences of Parental Bereavement*, Jessica Kingsley, London.

Impermanence (2016). Death Cafe. [www.deathcafe.com](http://www.deathcafe.com)

Jupp Kina, V. (2012) What we say and what we do: reflexivity, emotions and power in children and young people' participation, *Children's Geographies*, 10(2), 201—218.

Kellehear, A. (2012). *Compassionate Cities: Public health and end-of-life care*, London, Routledge.

Kotzee, B. (2012) 'Expertise, fluency and social realism about professional knowledge', *Journal of Education and Work*, 27(2), 161-178.

National Children's Bureau (2016). Bereaved Children are less likely to talk about their worries, accessed at: <https://www.ncb.org.uk/news-opinion/news-highlights/bereaved-children-less-likely-talk-about-their-worries-0>, accessed on 28th March 2019.

Pestoff, V., Brandsen, T. and Verschuere, B. (eds.) (2012). *New Public Governance, the Third Sector and Co-Production*, Abingdon, Routledge.

Pestoff, V. (2018). *Co-production and Public Service Management: Citizenship, Governance and Public Services Management*, London, Routledge.

Reddy, P., Lance, C., and Hulme, J. (2011). *Employability in Psychology: A guide for departments*. The Higher Education Academy, accessed at: <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/resources/employability-guide-final.pdf>

Ribbens McCarthy, J. & Jessop, J. (2005). The impact of bereavement and loss on young people, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, accessed at <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/impact-bereavement-and-loss-young-people>

Ribbens McCarthy, J. (2007). 'They all look as if they're coping, but I'm not': The Relational Power/lessness of 'Youth' in Responding to Experiences of Bereavement, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 10 (3), 285—303.

Rowlands, J. (1998). A Word of the Times, But What Does it Mean? Empowerment in the Discourse and Practice of Development, in Afshar, H. (ed) (2009). *Women and Empowerment: Illustrations from the Third World*, Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan.

Stone, B. (2015) *Engaged Learning Sheffield: co-production and community in education at the University of Sheffield*, Sheffield: University of Sheffield, accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2020 at:

[https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly\\_fs/1.521092!/file/EngagedLearningSheffield.pdf](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.521092!/file/EngagedLearningSheffield.pdf)

Strokosch, K. (2013). Co-production and innovation in public services: can co-production drive innovation?, in Osborne, S.P. & Brown, L. (eds.) *Handbook of Innovation in Public Services*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 375—389.

UNESCO (2014). *Global Citizenship Education. Preparing Learners for the Challenges of the 21st Century*, Paris, UNESCO.

Verschuere, B., Brandsen, T. & Pestoff, V. (2012) 'Co-production: The State of the Art in Research and the Future Agenda', *Voluntas* (23), pp. 1083-1101.

Vigoda, G. (2015) 'From Responsiveness to Collaboration: Governance, Citizens, and the Next Generation of Public Administration', in Roberts, N.R.(ed) *The Age of Direct Citizen Participation*, London: Routledge.

This work, 'Death, Bereavement and Loss Resources for Young People' was funded by the University of Bradford under their Higher Education Innovation Fund for Collaboration, Capacity and IP Development. The project drew on staff time and project resources and IP of the AHRC-funded 'Continuing Bonds: Exploring the meaning and legacy of death through past and contemporary practice' project (AH/M008266/1). Ethical Approval for both Dying to Talk and Continuing Bonds was gained through the University of Bradford.

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

### Acknowledgements

We are indebted to the project ambassadors for their participation in this project, along with our valued project partners (particularly Nicky Swayles, Nicky Clarke, Paul Thomas and Laura Brooks). We are grateful to the Heads and School teachers from our participant schools, especially Lyndsey Brown, Phillip Parr, Shabnam Khaliq, Rob Taylor and Liz Davies. The project formed part of parent project Continuing Bonds, funded by the AHRC (PI Karina Croucher, CoIs Christina Faull and Laura Green, and postdoctoral researchers Lindsey Büster and Jennifer Dayes). Many thanks to our Dying to Talk project assistant, Edward Faber. Thank you to our archaeology student volunteers: Haaroon Ahmed, Joyce Heberden and Ben Brace. Ambassadors who are happy to be named are: Aminah Ahmed, Alisha Ali, Annekah Ashfaq, Maëlle Badibanga, Zainab Iman, Madeyah Khan, Rebecca Smaller, and Nada Sulaiman. The Dying to Talk video was filmed and edited by Dan Carroll and Lewis Hackett, MYMUP. You can watch the video at [www.bradford.ac.ukDying-to-Talk](http://www.bradford.ac.ukDying-to-Talk).